CASE REPORT

Aggressive osteoblastoma of the maxilla-a diagnostic conundrum

Chetana Bhat1, Kaveri Hallikeri2,*, Punnya Angadi3

1Department of Oral Pathology, Manipal College of Dental Sciences, Manipal
2Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology, SDM College of Dental Sciences and Hospital, Dharwad.
3Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology, KLEVK Institute of Dental Sciences, Belagum

ABSTRACT

Osteoblastomas are biologically benign tumors with limited growth potential and may show a wide range of clinical, radiographic and histopathological findings. Osteoblastomas of the jaw may resemble other gnathic lesions including osteoid osteoma, cementoblastoma, cement-ossifying fibroma, cemento-osseous dysplasia and osteosarcoma, offering a unique diagnostic conundrum. Aggressive osteoblastoma, a rare variant of osteoblastoma characterized by the presence of atypical histopathological features like epithelioid osteoblasts and exhibiting locally aggressive behavior is rarely reported in the jaw bones. The accurate diagnosis and delineation of this entity from malignant bone tumors sometimes may be a challenge. The case report emphasizes this entity, which has to be differentiated from low-grade osteosarcoma and highlights the gravity of clinico-pathologic correlation in such lesions.

Key Words: Aggressive osteoblastoma, osteoblastoma, maxilla, epithelioid osteoblasts

Introduction

Osteoblastoma is an uncommon bone forming tumor accounting to 1% of all bone tumors, commonly found in vertebral columns and long bones. It accounts to 15% of cases in maxillofacial skeleton with greater frequency occurring in the mandible (1). The spectrum of osteoblastoma includes lesions characterized by trabeculae of newly formed osteoid lined by plump osteoblasts in a vascular background and a variant with high cellularity, prominent blue osteoid, epithelioid osteoblasts and mitosis designated as atypical osteoblastoma or aggressive osteoblastoma (AO). This subset of osteoblastoma has a locally aggressive behavior with high rate of recurrence but without metastatic potential (2). Dorfman and Weiss described aggressive osteoblastoma as borderline osteoblastic tumor with characteristic epithelioid osteoblasts (3). Microscopic features like focal presence of chondroid matrix, fine lace-like osteoid and mitosis necessitates a detailed clinical, radiographic and histopathological work up to rule out malignancy and is often arduous. Aggressive osteoblastoma is rarely reported in the jaw bones (4-7) with very few cases being reported in the maxilla (8,9). Here, we report a case of aggressive osteoblastoma of the maxilla in a 7-yr old boy.

Case report

A 7-yr old boy presented with a slow growing painless swelling on left upper jaw for one year. Examination revealed a large, non-tender, hard swelling measuring 3x4 cm on the palatal aspect extending from maxillary left deciduous lateral incisor to second molar (Figure 1a). General examination revealed no other abnormality. Orthopantomograph revealed well trabeculated radiopaque mass with radiolucent rim. Computed Tomography revealed a well circumscribed predominantly lytic expansile lesion around 3x4 cm with speckled calcifications (Figure 1b). Though a benign osteoblastic lesion was considered, the concern here was to rule out malignancy. An incisional biopsy disclosed a highly cellular lesional tissue composed of sheets of minimally pleomorphic epithelioid osteoblasts, osteoclast like giant cells with abundant osteoid formation. A striking presence of immature spiculated blue bone was noted with focal chondroid areas. The periphery showed transformation of blue bone to a more organized

*Corresponding Author: Dr. Kaveri Hallikeri, Professor & Head, Department of Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology, S.D.M. College of Dental sciences and Hospital, Dharwad -580009, Karnataka, INDIA, Fax No: 0836-2467612, E-mail: drcauveri2005@gmail.com
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trabeculae of woven bone (Figures 2 & 3) with no evidence of permeation into the host bone. The clinical, radiographic and histomorphologic features were most consistent with a diagnosis of aggressive osteoblastoma. The patient underwent a segmental resection and primary reconstruction (Figure 1c). Excisional histopathology confirmed our diagnosis. Patient had an uneventful postoperative course; a two years follow-up showed no evidence of recurrence.

Discussion

The term “Aggressive Osteoblastoma” (AO), was first used by Dorfman to describe a rare bone neoplasm that composed of prominent epithelioid cells, demonstrating locally aggressive growth and high recurrence rate but no metastatic potential (10). In the jaw bones, this entity is extremely rare with only few cases being reported till date to which we add another case (Table 1) (4-9). Extragnathic AO tend to occur in the third to fourth decade, however, most reported cases in the jaws show a predilection for the second and third decades and exhibit a male predominance (4-9,11,12). They demonstrate local destruction, rapid growth and present as expansile osteolytic lesion with focal radiopacities (4). The overlapping histomorphologic features and limited published criteria about this tumor makes differentiating an AO from other osteoid producing lesions a considerable challenge.

The histopathologic differential diagnosis of an osteoblastic lesion includes osteoid osteoma,
Table 1. Clinicopathological features of reported cases of aggressive osteoblastoma of the jaws

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Age (years)</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Histopathology</th>
<th>Symptoms and Duration</th>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vigneswaran N et al. 4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Mandible</td>
<td>Solid sheets of epithelioid cells, amorphous osteoid with foci of calcification</td>
<td>Swelling and Pain, 8 months</td>
<td>Resection with wide surgical margins</td>
<td>No recurrence 2 yr follow up</td>
</tr>
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<td>Vigneswaran N et al. 4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mandible</td>
<td>Solid sheets of epithelioid cells, amorphous osteoid with foci of calcification</td>
<td>Swelling</td>
<td>Resection with wide surgical margins</td>
<td>No recurrence 2 yr follow up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lypka MA et al. 5</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Mandible</td>
<td>Sheets of epithelioid cells, calcified matrix</td>
<td>Swelling &amp; pain, 1 year</td>
<td>Segmental resection</td>
<td>No recurrence 1 yr follow up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohkubo T et al. 8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Maxilla</td>
<td>Sheets of epithelioid cells, partially calcified osteoid material</td>
<td>Painful swelling, 6 months</td>
<td>En bloc resection</td>
<td>No recurrence 4 yr follow up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrington C et al. 9</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Maxilla</td>
<td>Sheets of epithelioid osteoblasts, giant cells, transformation of blue bone to organized eosinophilic trabeculae of woven bone</td>
<td>Asymptomatic, several months</td>
<td>Partial Maxillectomy</td>
<td>No recurrence 8 months follow up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DPV et al. 7</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Mandible</td>
<td>Woven osteoid and trabeculae of varying degree of mineralization, osteoblasts with eosinophilic cytoplasm and eccentric nuclei, mitotic figures, giant cells</td>
<td>Painful swelling, 8 months</td>
<td>Resection with continuity defect</td>
<td>No recurrence 15 month follow up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Case</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Maxilla</td>
<td>Sheets of epithelioid cells, giant cells, spiculated blue bone with focal chondroid area.</td>
<td>Swelling, 1 year</td>
<td>Segmental resection</td>
<td>No recurrence 2 years follow up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

cemento-osseous dysplasia, cementoblastoma, cement-ossifying fibroma and osteosarcoma. The nidus of osteoid osteoma consists of highly vascularized fibrous stroma with interconnected trabeculae of osteoid and woven bone lined by osteoblasts and osteoclasts. The lesion though having a close histological resemblance to osteoblastoma, is usually < 2 cm in diameter exhibiting dull aching pain with an exacerbation at night and being relieved by salicylates (11). Focal cement-osseous dysplasia predominantly involves the body of the mandible and presents as a radioopacity surrounded by a rim of radiolucency. Histologically it is characterized by interlacing trabeculae similar to osteoblastoma with other forms of mineralization resembling cellular cementum with spindled cellular connective tissue that may be well vascularized. Unlike osteoblastoma, plump osteoblasts are not a component of the lesion.13 Cementoblastoma, being considered a true odontogenic neoplasm appears as a radiopaque mass fused to the roots (1). Histopathologically they reveal interlacing trabeculae of mineralized tissue resembling cellular cementum having an eosinophilic appearance compared to the characteristic
basophilic trabeculae seen in osteoblastoma. Cells are plump, angulated and plasmacytoid similar to osteoblastoma but fusion of calcified component to resorbed root of an adjacent tooth is evident (13). Central ossifying fibroma is another osteoid forming lesion characterized by well-developed connective tissue capsule and relatively uniform cellular proliferation of spindle shaped fibroblastic cells with irregular shaped trabeculae of either woven bone or cellular cementum (9,13). Conventional osteoblastoma exhibits limited growth potential with similar histopathological features, osteoblasts having moderate amount of cytoplasm, absence of mitotic figures and cellular atypia (9). The most significant of the lesions in the differential diagnosis of aggressive osteoblastoma is the low grade osteosarcoma. AO histologically is characterized by non-infiltrative sheets of epithelioid osteoblasts, giant cells of osteoclast type, lace like osteoid production and presence of spiculated blue bone (4). However, in osteosarcoma; tumor cells additionally exhibit extensive cellular anaplasia, deeply stained cytoplasm with hyperchromatic nuclei, prominent nucleoli, abnormal mitotic figures, tumor invasion into host bone or soft tissue and necrosis which are not observed in aggressive osteoblastoma (13, 14). Although the presence of epithelioid osteoblasts is a characteristic feature of AO, they are not a reliable indicator of its biologic behavior, which rather could be dependent on the location and size of the lesion. The presence of epithelioid osteoblasts and its correlation with aggressive behavior and recurrence has not been substantiated (15-17). Presence of chondroid matrix has been infrequently reported in osteoblastoma (17) and was an interesting feature observed in our case. The presence of cartilaginous matrix in an osteoid forming bone tumor does not necessarily rule out the diagnosis of osteoblastoma, nor does it necessarily support the diagnosis of osteosarcoma. Osteoblastomas may reveal areas of metaplastic hyaline cartilage after several recurrences, but in our case it was seen at the first presentation and therefore could be a part of the tumor. No significant difference in the prognosis has been noted in osteoblastomas with or without cartilaginous matrix (17). Surgical resection and reconstruction is the recommended treatment for such lesions (5). Most cases in the jaws showed no evidence of recurrence after a follow up of 8 months-4 years (Table 1).

Aggressive osteoblastoma is a rare entity and due to the overlapping histopathological features in osteoid forming lesions, an accurate diagnosis warrants a thorough clinical, radiological and histopathological workup to prevent over treatment especially in young individuals.

Conflicts of interest: None declared

References